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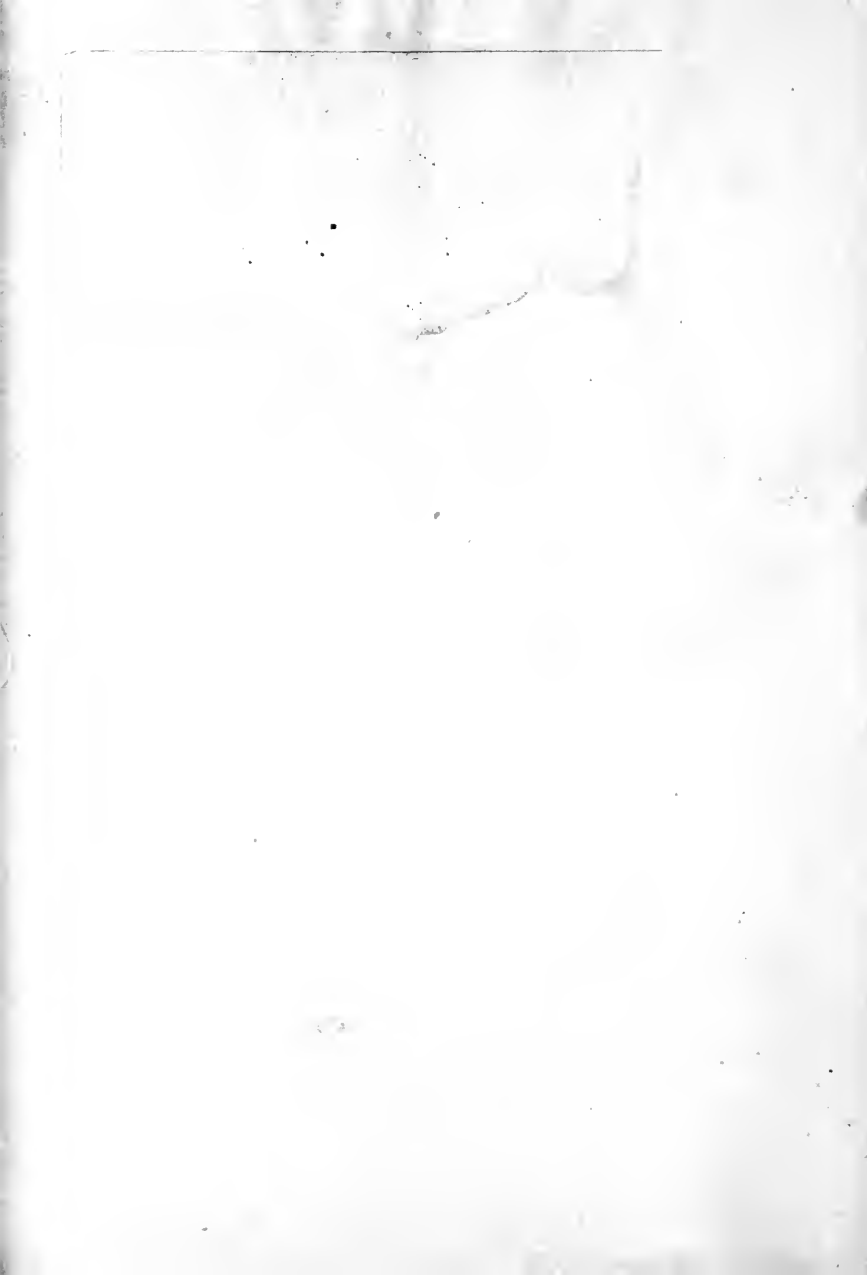
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THE PLAYMATE HOURS

By Mary Thacher Higginson



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THE PLAYMATE HOURS



THE PLAYMATE HOURS

BY
MARY THACHER HIGGINSON



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THE PLAYMATE HOURS

THE PLAYMATE HOURS

DAWN lingers silent in the shade of night,
Till on the gloaming Baby's laughter rings.
Then smiling Day awakes, and open flings
Her golden doors, to speed the shining flight
Of restless hours, gay children of the light.
Each eager playfellow to Baby brings
Some separate gift, — a flitting bird that sings
With her; a waving branch of berries bright;
A heap of rustling leaves; each trifle cheers
This joyous little life but just begun.
No weary hour to her brings sighs or tears;
And when the shadows warn the loitering sun,
With blossoms in her hands, untouched by
fears,
She softly falls asleep, and day is done.

TWILIGHT

A WEARY man sat lost in thought ;
The firelight sank beneath his look ;
And shadows, by his fancy wrought,
Soon lurked in every nook.

A birdlike voice rang through the hall ;
Two little feet danced down the stair ;
The fire leaped up at that blithe call,
And gleamed on shining hair.

“ I am so glad,” the gay song was ;
“ So glad,” it echoed to and fro ;
“ I don’t know why, unless because
You are papa, you know !”

Care fled before that sweet belief ;
The shadows melted quite away ,
The weary man forgot his grief,
Forgot his hair was gray.

THE ANCHORED DORIES

As lilies, floating side by side,
Lie on the water's breast,
So on this ever changing tide
The tranquil dories rest.

A slender cord the only stay
For blossom or for boat,
Yet with the lily's poise and sway
These graceful shallops float.

The bay becomes a golden floor
Beneath the sunset's gleam ;
Rose-petals, wafted from the shore,
The tinted dories seem.

Before the gale brave vessels flee,
And shun the tempest's shock ;
But dauntless in the plunging sea
These tiny coasters rock.

O heart of mine, so buoyant now,
Hopes sink, with none to save ;
But in life's storms, remember how
The dories ride the wave !

BETWEEN THE LIGHTS

ALL through the silent night,
When tired men are sleeping,
And children dream,
And stars our hopes are keeping,
The wayside lamp is bright,
And throws its gleam
On homes of joy and weeping.

Slowly the radiant day
Left all the world repining
(Thus droops the rose
When summer is declining).
Ere dawn the wayside ray
More swiftly goes —
Vanished the friendly shining !

'T is that the lonely night
Its brief farewell is taking.
The glimmer dies
Because the earth is waking.
Darkness prepares for flight,
Though timid eyes
See not that morn is breaking.

GHOST-FLOWERS

(*Monotropa uniflora*)

IN shining groups, each stem a pearly ray,
Weird flecks of light within the shadowed wood,
They dwell aloof, a spotless sisterhood.
No Angelus, except the wild bird's lay,
Awakes these forest nuns; yet night and day
Their heads are bent, as if in prayerful mood.
A touch will mar their snow, and tempests rude
Defile; but in the mist fresh blossoms stray
From spirit-gardens just beyond our ken.
Each year we seek their virgin haunts, to look
Upon new loveliness, and watch again
Their shy devotions near the singing brook;
Then, mingling in the dizzy stir of men,
Forget the vows made in that cloistered nook.

REPRIEVE

TEMPESTS and clouds made dark the day
For fitful Madge and me ;
At length repentance had its way,
And brought her to my knee.

The softened eyes revealed a tear,
But hope is brave at ten.
“ Will you forgive me, mother dear?
Can I begin again? ”

“ Oh, child,” I said with weary sigh,
“ Too often you begin.”
“ Yes, mother ; ” and the calm reply
Showed victory within.

In this remorseful heart sank deep
My lambkin's pleading glance :
What if the Shepherd of the sheep
Denied me one more chance ?

CHANGELINGS

THE ghosts of flowers went sailing
Through the dreamy autumn air —
The gossamer wings of the milkweed brown,
And the sheeny silk of the thistle-down,
But there was no bewailing,
And never a hint of despair.

From the mountain-ash was swinging
A gray deserted nest;
Scarlet berries where eggs had been;
Softly the flower-wraiths floated in.
And the brook and breeze were singing
When the sun sank down in the west.

“BEHOLD, I SHEW YOU A MYSTERY”

(H. E. S. AND A. H.)

Two ways were theirs to reach the unknown shore :

One man was held in the fierce grasp of pain,
And watched the springs of being slowly wane ;
The other no such bitter trial bore,

But dropping 'mid his fellows, breathed no more.

Men grieved, and listened for some sad refrain
From homes bereft ; and trembling for the twain
Whose lingering lives were crushed, I sought their
door.

They spoke in turn : “ It always was his prayer
To go out like a flash : this chides regret.”

“ He wished I should a garb of sunshine wear.”

Both women smiled ; only my eyes were wet.

O Life and Death, what mysteries ye share !
Greatest of all, the love that ye beget !

INLAND

My home is far above the ocean sands, —
Too far to watch the surges roll and break ;
But every day across those meadow-lands
Fly sea-gulls toward the lake.

No sound of dashing waves the silence brings ;
No foam, like drifting snow, delights the eye ;
Instead, a sudden cloud of rushing wings
Gleams white against the sky.

The sight of graceful schooners sailing fast,
Straight for their harbor, is denied to me ;
But I can count the fair gulls soaring past,
They are my ships and sea.

VIRGIN'S BOWER

As still as a cathedral close,
And guarded by a wall of green,
A garden full of lilies grows
Which no man's eye hath ever seen.
Only the fragrance, like a prayer,
Escapes to bless the outer air.

Sometime the hidden must be known :
A stranger's step will scale the wall,
And claim the blossoms for his own,
And glean the petals as they fall.
Ah ! let him come with careful tread,
With reverent hands, uncovered head !

But should a reckless soul find room
Within this kingdom of delight,
And trample down the lilies' bloom,
And put the singing birds to flight,
Before such havoc meet my eye,
Be kind, O God ! and let me die.

TONGUE-TIED

THE despot, Winter, lays his magic hand
Upon the singing brooks, and they are still.
Thus my glad life is fettered by the chill
Of silence, potent in this Northern land;
And he who knows me best can understand.
When springtime melts the snow, streams run at
will,
So love may break reserve, words rush and thrill,
But habit soon resumes its stern command.
“Canst bear with me?” I plead. How sad his tone!
“The current flows, the ice will yet succumb,
The mountain’s heart is warmed by flames un-
known,
Though the volcano’s lips be cold and numb.”
He waits. The fires burn red for him alone.
Yet when he craves a sign, lo! I am dumb.

COULEUR DE ROSE

Out there the salt foam was seething and flying,
The rose on the downs was watching and sighing ;

Thought the rose,

“ If I could shed

My fragrance over the sea,

Nobody knows —

He might be led

To silence his roar and think of me.”

Out there the hushed sea was glistening and glowing,
The rose on the downs was blushing and blowing ;

Thought the rose,

“ He felt the charm ;

The waves are pink on the sea !

At the day's close

All 's safe from harm,

And he wears my color for love of me.”

EXILES

(SILVERTON, COLORADO.)

VAST walls of rock on either side
 Surround our eagle-nest.
Beyond, the world is fair and wide ;
 But on that mountain crest
The red stone glimmers through the snow,
The spruce grows green on slopes below ;
The aspen waves its leaves of gold,
And we forget that life of old.

Sometimes through boughs of stately elms
 The orioles flash in dreams ;
But ere the thought our peace o'erwhelms,
 A nobler vision gleams
From lofty peaks, where rays of light
Dart swiftly on from height to height,
Till far above us smiles the morn.
Night lingers here, but day is born !

When silence seems too great to bear
 Beneath those awful domes,
A silvery tinkle fills the air, —
 Down come the mountain gnomes !

We watch the little *burros* creep
Along the wild and slippery steep,
Laden with wealth of shining ore ;
And loneliness is ours no more.

For clouds that other skies can show
 The undimmed blue we see ;
And back and forth the miners go,
 With hearts as brave and free
As Alpine flowers beneath their feet,
Or this crisp air so fresh and sweet.
Dear Eastern homes with memories rife,
Our hearts are yours, but here is life !

4

INHERITANCE

WE wondered why he always turned aside
When mirth and gladness filled the brimming days.
Who else so fit as he for pleasure's ways?
Men thought him frozen by a selfish pride;
But that his voice was music none denied,
Or that his smile was like the sun's warm rays.
One day upon the sands he spoke in praise
Of swimmers who were buffeting the tide:
"The swelling waves of life they dare to meet.
I may not plunge where others safely go.
Unbidden longings in my pulses beat."
O blind and thoughtless world! you little know
That ever round this hero's steadfast feet
Surges and tugs the dreaded undertow.

A FEATHER DROPPED

A LITTLE cottage on the shaded way ;
Houstonias in the grass ;
And smiles for all who pass
From one whose heart is lavish as the day.

And when that door was closed to life and light,
How could the blossoms know ?
The poppy shed its glow ;
The tall narcissus kept its virgin white.

The scarlet clusters of the bittersweet
Hung tempting as of yore ;
But she was there no more
To watch the bluebirds claim their autumn treat.

They may have missed her care and tender thought
For all, whate'er betide ;
For through the chimney wide
One shy yet daring bird an entrance sought.

A feather here and there betrayed the quest
Within the silent room,
As if defying gloom ;
Though birds had flown and she was with the Blest.

GLIMPSEWOOD

THE water glimmering through the leaves, —
One soft blue peak above, —
The murmuring quiet summer weaves, —
This is thy home, dear love !

The pewee's call awakes the day,
And in the twilight dim
The hermit-thrush's thrilling lay
Shall be thine evening hymn.

The forest birches wave and gleam
Through boughs of feathery pine.
Ah, no, dear love ! 't is not a dream ;
This fairy home is thine.

THE HERMIT THRUSH

BEHIND this leafy screen
Which keeps the world away,
A forest bird unseen
To music sets our day.

Sometimes his voice is mute ;
He ponders things divine ;
Then sounds his magic flute,
And makes the woods a shrine.

He chants of life above
This realm that mortals know ;
He dreams of purer love
Than human souls bestow.

O priest and choir in one !
Still lend to earth thy wings,
And show beneath the sun
One heart that soars and sings.

THE WAY OUT

I SEE the winding path that leads away
From this fair sheltered home among the trees,
Where pines are stirred to music by the breeze,
And on gray rocks the leafy shadows play.
But in this realm serene I fain would stay,
Like an imprisoned man who on his knees
Has sued for freedom dear, yet, when he sees
The open door, shrinks from the light of day.
His anguish now is healed ; yet wherefore hie
To a forgetful world, oppressed by wrong?
Could but this atmosphere around me lie,
Still breathing peace amid the bustling throng ;
Could but this trembling voice, however shy,
Dispel one discord with the forest song !

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

IF messengers we fear
Should hither come to-day,
And beckon me away
From all that earth holds dear ;

And I should trembling turn
And cling to glowing life,
Yet in the fiercest strife
Feel heart and reason burn ;

Then look into love's face,
And see with anguish wild
Our rosy little child
With all her baby grace,

And stretch my feeble hand
To keep the darling near, —
My fainting soul would hear
A voice from spirit-land.

That voice would set me free,
With joy my pulses thrill :
“ Mamma, I need you still !
Have you forgotten me ? ”

BUILDING

HE

Now say, love, where the nest shall be :
Upon the cliffs that front the sea,
 Where the white foam flies,
 And the white gull cries,
And distant waters sink and rise
Till they are lost in bluer skies?

Or shall it be among the hills,
Beside the shaded forest rills,
 Where the mosses cling,
 And the thrushes sing,
And dragon-flies on gauzy wing
Forever haunt the mountain spring?

SHE

I cannot choose when days are bright,
The test must be the storm and night ;
 When the raindrops fall,
 And the loud winds call,
And mists roll in — a gloomy wall —
To hide both sea and land from all.

Upon the shore, where fog-bells wail,
One dreams of wrecks amid the gale ;
 But the birches shine,
 And the leaflets fine
Are strung with pearls on the rain-swept pine
In the woodland home that shall be mine.

HOUSED

“GOOD-BY, mamma,” and forth she flies,
Fit comrade for the radiant day.
A host of groundless fears arise ;
Those steps may go astray.

O mother robin, lend me wings
To follow where my birdling goes ;
Like thine, she darts away and sings
Unconscious of her foes.

“Good-night, mamma,” the same sweet voice,
Still eager for to-morrow’s sun ;
While I so earnestly rejoice
The anxious day is done.

My little warbling bird is still ;
And yet I love this hour the best ;
For there she is, secure from ill,
Within her sheltered nest.

THE TEST

“THY love,” he cried, “is like a fragrant flower
Whose stainless beauty cannot fade or die.”

“And thine,” she blushing said, “is like some high,
Still tide that knows no ebb to check its power.”

But when life's changes brought a darkened hour,
In secret each heart feared love's doom was nigh.

“The tide goes out ; storms kill the blossom shy.”

Then clasping hands, they turned to meet the
shower ;

Courage and hope were nursed for many a day.

At length the mists rolled off, their dream was true !
Beneath no restless tide the anchor lay

That held her safe ; his deathless flower but grew
More fair ; love's test withstood, along their way
Sang blithe content 'neath clouds or skies of blue.

EXPECTANT

At dusk, within the land-locked bay,
Like birds that seek the nest,
Or children wearied with their play,
The sloops come home to rest.

Then from a hamlet near the shore
We watch the dropping sail,
While floats across the lonely moor
The whistling of the quail.

We strain our eyes till in the dark
Yon point is lost to view ;
To-morrow shall we greet the bark,
When wave and sky are blue?

And while beneath the veil of night
These restless waters sleep,
Each vessel burns a fairy light,
The glow-worms of the deep.

A brooding mist the dawn may hide,
The fog-bell sound its moan,
And spectral schooners softly glide
Into the gray unknown.

Oh, pray that when we hail with glee
 Their glad return at last,
One fatal sign we may not see, —
 The flag half down the mast !

STRICKEN

“DEAR Lord, and must I fold my hands?
All through my life I’ve prayed to thee
That I might never idle be ;
Dare I rebel at thy commands?

“O shed on me thy healing light !
For long my feet have failed to tread
The busy paths where duty led,
And now my fingers feel the blight.”

She looks with sweet, pathetic eyes
Upon her cherished tasks, begun
By other hands, or left undone ;
Then on herself with sad surprise.

Not rest she craves, but to be free :
And we who love her kneel each day,
Perplexed and pained, to humbly pray,
“Dear Lord, and must she idle be?”

HE GIVETH SNOW

PAIN ushered in the sullen day.

“ Oh, cold, gray day ! ” I said,
“ I only asked one little ray
Of hope, and hope is dead.”

Like some great brooding bird above,
The sky let fall its feathery down.
“ Take the dark earth,” she said, “ my love !
Weave Nature’s bridal gown ! ”

I opened wide the snowy door ;
The soft flakes fluttered round my head ;
“ Beauty, at least, lives evermore.”
I turned, but pain had fled.

POMPEII

FRESH from the Carnival's grotesque delight
We trod thy streets, O City of the dead,
The pavements echoing back our conscious tread.
About us rose the homes a sudden blight
Had cursed, now hopeless as the fatal sight
Of dread Medusa's face. The soul had fled,
Leaving its mortal life a book outspread.
Within those frescoed walls — bare rooms, once
bright
With children's glee — what warning could we find ?
In myriad haunting tones the answer came :
“ Let death move swift or slow, hold thou in mind
Thy brothers' needs, nor seek for earthly fame ;
But let thy daily living yield mankind
The priceless record of a lofty aim.”

COBWEBS

No longer fairies hold their sway ;
 Yet tiny hammocks swing
From waving summer boughs to-day,
 And to the grasses cling
Soft beaded veils of woven mist,
Where elves were wont to hold their tryst.

The busy little gnome who spreads
 Unseen these dainty things
Can mingle with his fragile threads
 No hope of future wings, —
Unlike the rival worm who spins
His silken shroud and heaven wins.

Nature has weavers who possess
 Beauty and power of song.
The spider in his humble dress
 Is silent under wrong,
And with his webs the vireos dare
To make their pendent nests more fair ;

Yet still undaunted by his fate
 He hangs this shimmering lace

On awkward wall or clumsy gate
 With matchless skill and grace ;
But ceaseless foes his fabrics rend, —
Titania's weaver has no friend.

GIFTS

A FLAWLESS pearl, snatched from an ocean cave,
Remote from light or air,
And by the mad caress of stormy wave
Made but more pure and fair ;

A diamond, wrested from earth's hidden zone,
To whose recesses deep
It clung, and bravely flashed a light that shone
Where dusky shadows creep ;

A sapphire, in whose heart the tender rays
Of summer skies had met ;
A ruby, glowing with the ardent blaze
Of suns that never set, —

These priceless jewels shone, one happy day,
On my bewildered sight ;
“ We bring from earth, sea, sky,” they seemed to say,
“ Love's richness and delight.”

“ For me ? ” I trembling cried. “ Thou need'st not
dread,”
Sang heavenly voices sweet ;
And unseen hands placed on my lowly head
This crown, for angels meet.

THE WHITE DUNE

A GHOSTLY beacon in its awful white,
The lonely beach slopes down to meet the sea,
And spreads its sand, like snow, on rock and lea.
The pines that once relieved the dazzled sight,
That sheltered farms and stayed the northern flight
Of singing birds, are gone. Each sturdy tree
A victim fell to thoughtless man's decree ;
The winds avenged the wrong in one wild night.
Now, on this waste the tides of autumn toss
Their ripened sheaves of wondrous form and hue.
The shore is brilliant with the tinted moss
Garnered in darkness by those waters blue.
A vestal pale, the white dune bears her cross
Till this, the yearly carnival, is due.

TRANSFORMATION

WHAT has befallen the wayward girl
With her ripples of laughter, her gushes of song?
Her varying moods, like the summer clouds
That tease the day as they float along?

The saucy gleam in her hazel eyes —
Like the warning light on a dangerous shore —
Has changed to the steadfast glow of a star,
Uplifting and blessing forevermore.

The soul looks out of her woman's face ;
That fairy with rainbow wings has flown :
For silently weaving his mystic spell,
An enchanter, called Love, has claimed his own !

CONQUERED

ONE day he said: "I long to go
Where green fields slope to meet the tide,
And sweet wild roses bud and blow
Upon the cold rock's side ;

"Where swallows nest in fragrant barns,
With sea-winds blowing through the hay,
And hills behind, with shadowy tarns,
Look down upon the bay."

"Ah, yes !" she sighed, "I know it all, —
The wooded isles, the curving shore,
The plashing waves, the sea-bird's call,
Sounds I shall hear no more !"

He brought pink clovers, and a sheaf
Of daisies in their gold and white,
Sweet-fern, blue harebells, bayberry leaf ;
She grasped them with delight.

"From breezy pastures they have strayed ;
They bring me whiffs of cool salt air ;
Before these spicy blossoms fade,
Love, you must take me there !"

BETRAYAL

OUT of the chilling rain and fog
That hid the mountain from our sight,
A dusky cloud came floating down
At early dawn of light.

The cloud dropped softly to the lake
Amid a sound of whirring wings,
And spread into a graceful line
A host of living things.

We hailed this burst of joyous life,
The sunless day seemed dark no more;
When suddenly a shot rang out
And echoed round the shore.

The water-fowl were nature's guests,
But they were doomed; and all that day
The shots pealed forth and on the waves
The dead and dying lay.

At last into the brooding mist,
There vanished, softly as it came,
A broken flock, with plumage torn,
After that day of shame.

ABSENT

SHE never said, "Lost is my dearest one ;"

The phrase "not living" would have hushed her
song

Of faith. How could his silent voyage seem long
When she, whose joyless days had now begun,
Said "absent" with a smile which meant the sun
Was only dimmed by clouds? Then, if a throng
Of painful thoughts pressed hard, it made her strong
To think how he would wish life's duties done.

In her sweet face, where grief had left its seam,
A tender gladness dawned, as years took flight,
And brought the meeting near. Nor did she dream
That from her trusting heart there shone a light
For eyes too weak to bear the larger gleam
That led her on, as stars redeem the night.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN JACKS

THROUGH the little mining town,
Snow-capped mountains looking down,
 Roam the idle Jacks ;
Sniffing at the parson's door,
Where a hungry beast is sure
 To get the thing he lacks.

Over rocks, and through the pines
Where the yellow aspen shines,
 Wind the narrow trails
Worn by patient donkey feet,
Climbing on through frost and heat,
 Fogs, or biting gales.

Till the sturdy, toiling Jacks,
Bearing coal and food in sacks,
 Reach the mining camp.
But the women down below
When the friendly *burros* go
 Miss their aimless tramp.

Jingle go the donkey bells !
Each returning satchel swells
 With gold and silver ore.
Glad we are to see them back,
Every stupid, braying Jack —
 The town 's alive once more !

BLOSSOMING

O LILY bud ! thy lovers wait
 To see thy bloom unfold ;
The fragrant petals open late ;
 Unveil that heart of gold !

The sunbeams my impatience share ;
 To other flowerets hie
Those restless blossoms of the air
 The bee and butterfly.

Serene and cold, the lily said :
 “ My tryst is with the night ;
When glow-worms their glad radiance shed,
 I burst my fetters white.”

And poised upon her stately stalk,
 I caught the gleam afar :
What was it lit the garden walk,
 A lily or a star ?

IN A ROSE GARDEN

“ No dowry for my girl have I,”

He said with stately grace ;

“ But I will give her, ere I die, —

These trophies of her race.

“ Dear to my heart is every one ;

The fairest goes with you, —

The rest, bequeathed by sire to son,

Will bear transplanting too.”

He led him to a garden door,

And watched his rapt surprise :

A wealth of roses blushed before

The lover's wondering eyes.

They trailed their richness on the ground ;

They bloomed upon the wall ;

And in their midst his bride he found,

The sweetest bud of all.

The father smiled, and hid his pain ;

But from their wedding day

His broken life began to wane,

And swiftly ebbd away.

And when his gentle spirit passed
In that rose-scented air,
With roses, comrades to the last,
They filled his vacant chair.

TO A POET ON HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY

(H. W. L., FEBRUARY 27, 1877)

THE young and rosy years, with footsteps fleet,
Whose dreamy, echoing voices still resound,
And other years, with mournful cypress crowned,
Have laid their offerings at thy gracious feet,
And won thy benediction, poet sweet!
For in the darkest seas that grief can sound,
What buoyant wings of faith thy songs have found!
And now from every land thy lovers meet,
And vie to heap their treasures at thy door.
Here violets with woodland odors rife
Breathe fragrant thoughts, and from a distant shore
Come Easter lilies, stainless as thy life,
While all unite in one prophetic cry,
“Thy years may wane, but thou canst never die.”

WAIFS

ALL through the golden haze
Leaves were drifting and falling ;
All through the mellow days
Boughs were bending and calling
To their little castaways.

Through branches almost bare
A squirrel came frisking and springing.
No restless birds were there ;
Yet he was bounding and swinging
As if born of the sky and air.

But in the winter cold
Who will be loving and caring
For the leaves, then withered and old ;
Or the sprite with his tilting and daring,
And no tender arm to enfold?

All through the changeful year
Nature is finding and keeping
A home for her children dear ;
And the waifs may go fluttering or leaping
With never a shade of fear.

THE STRENGTH OF THE HILLS

A MIDNIGHT hush pervades the air,
No birdling chirps, no leaflet stirs;
Midsummer heat is everywhere,
Even among the firs.

What far-off sound grows on the ear?
Through wild ravines it sweeps along,
As if some swift-winged bird drew near
To wake the night with song.

A rustle fills the birches tall;
A sudden coolness fans the cheek:
Monadnock's breath bears life to all
Beneath his rugged peak.

For here each day is born anew,
A chaste Diana, fresh and fair,
Whose arrows, dipped in forest dew,
Transfix each worldly care.

TAKING LEAVE

WHEN the thrush brief snatches sang
 Of his wondrous tune,
And the woods no longer rang
 With the joy of June,
Then we knew that day by day
Summer's face would turn away.

From the ripened thistles went
 Floating wee balloons ;
All seemed on a journey bent,
 In those August noons.
But lake and sky wore deeper blue,
To show that Summer's heart was true.

Soon the birches could not hold
 Back their yellow leaves ;
Royal roads must shine with gold,
 Though the forest grieves ;
Lighting now their torches red,
Maples in the pageant led.

Shrillest herald of the fall,
 Piped the busy jay ;

Armies, mustering at his call,
 Winged their silent way ;
Drowsy crickets chirped good-by ;
Lingered last one butterfly.

Not unguarded is the throne :
 Chickadees are left,
Pine and fir trees hold their own ;
 Can we feel bereft?
Nay, amid the snow and frost,
Summer's colors are not lost.

IN THE DARK

THE fields were silent, and the woodland drear,
The moon had set, and clouds hid all the stars ;
And blindly, when a footfall met my ear,
I reached across the bars.

And swift as thought this hand was clasped in thine,
Though darkness hung around us and above ;
Not guided by uncertain fate to mine,
But by the law of love.

I know not which of us may first go hence
And leave the other to be brave alone,
Unable to dispel the shadows dense
That veil the life unknown ;

But if I linger last, and stretch once more
A longing hand, when fades this earthly day,
Again it will be grasped by thine, before
My steps can lose the way.

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